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Our Top Fall-Down

Comic

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A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

You'll learn more by listening to political humorists than political analysts. No didactic essay explains Sen. Henry Jackson's problems with getting the presidential nomination better than comedian Mark Russell's remark that if Scoop gave a fireside chat, the fire would go out.

By this standard President Ford is in much worse shape than the polls indicate. The newest joke going around about him, concerns his diving into a Florida swimming pool that is three strokes shorter than the one at the White House. As he surfaces at the far end with a big bump on his head, the Secret Service wrestles the pool to the ground.

Some of the jokes are crueler. Like the fictitious newspaper headline which says Ford Shot In Head: Bullet in Critical Condition. Then there is the crack that

the automobile insurance companies have advised their policyholders not to drive for an hour after Ford has made a speech.

Amid rumors that one of the big magazines is preparing a photo montage of President Klutz falling down stairs and tripping over old ladies in wheelchairs,

Poster

the White House press corps manfully tries to take him seriously. Enormous expenditures of ink and ingenuity have been committed to making the Sunday Night Massacre look dishonestly evil instead of stone stupid. Surely, his sharper advisers—assuming he has some—would also prefer to have their blunderous leader regarded as

malevolent rather than dumb. We respect the wicked but we laugh at the inept.

Whether or not Mr. Ten Thumbs becomes the first President to be laughed out of office, matters have reached the point that one Washington newsie assigned to cover the Great Flub-Dub was heard to complain that ineptitude on such a scale is beginning to reflect unfavorably on those who have to report it. Others might think that an insufferably moralistic press now has the Chief Magistrate it always said it wanted.

Of course, there are some folks who're saying that Jerry Ford has gone back on his word to give us an open White House wherein dwells an accessible President, but the truth is Mr. Nice Guy's candor is so embarrassing one wishes he'd go hide somewhere and cover up his nakedness.

Yet Gerald Rudolph, who is truly without guile, is exactly the man so many prayed for in the last months of the Nixon disillusionment.

Or why was Richard Nixon run out of town? The Prisoner of San Clemente, when word of his thoughts filter out at all, professes mystification as to what really cost him his job. As time passes, it does become more difficult to explain why he is in exile.

In the months since his departure, his defense looks better and better. Half a dozen congressional committees have brought forth volumes of information all adducing that the break-ins, the tapping, snooping and harassment have been routine government activities for a generation at least. Well, he cheated on his taxes. Well, Teddy Roosevelt cheated

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COMMENTARY

America's No. 1 Fall-Down May Be Nixon's Salvation

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on HIS taxes. Well, Nixon lied. Well, more successful Presidents arranged things so that others lied for them.

The illegal campaign contributions? G. Rudolph doesn't accept illegal contributions. In fact, it's beginning to look as though he's having trouble finding many LEGAL campaign contributions. Who gives money to someone catastrophically close to making himself into the national clown?

After 15 months of decency, openness and personal honesty, it turns out that the essential direction of government remains as it has been for ever so long. All those businessmen with their attache cases full of crisply

naughty greenbacks could have saved themselves a lot of money and painful days in court.

If Nixon didn't get sacked for policy reasons, if the government remains as it was, then did he walk the plank because of the peculiar gracelessness of his behavior? Perhaps our ideal President is he who can combine Nixon's politics with Ford's personality. What's the operative difference between the two men? Nixon drew up the enemies list but Ford invited them all to dinner, so maybe it was the snobs who did him in, the people who understand burglary is necessary for national security but can't stand to know it's going on. Nixon always acted like such a damn social climber; G. Rudolph by contrast is a

loveable unpretentious hick who can't pronounce the word judgment and says gummert without noticing it so we'll let him finish out his term.

Shall he be granted another? Theoretically, it is impossible to deprive a sitting President of a second term this side of cataclysm, but Nixon's Revenge, as they've started to call Old Bungle Foot, may have found a way. However, since the Democrats have yet to find a plausible candidate and you can't beat somebody with nobody, defeat may yet elude our Rudolph. In that case, we'll have no choice but to pull the plug on him and commit euthanasia by running Richard Nixon as our reform candidate next year.

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